CHAPTER 5

Three Great Revolutions That Have Increased Our Political Wisdom

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To illustrate the thesis advanced in the preceding chapter, I would call attention to three great advances in political thought that were occasioned or conditioned by radical, progressive, and revolutionary changes in the organization and institutions of society. But, first, let me explain what I mean by characterizing these changes as radical, progressive, and revolutionary. After that I will attempt to give a brief description of these three steps forward in political life and political thought.

The changes that I have in mind can be characterized and named in a number of different ways. In calling them *radical* changes, I mean to say that they involved a change in kind, not just in degree: something new was added, not just more of the same. In calling them *progressive*, I am stressing the fact that improvement was accomplished—a whole step forward was taken toward the best society that is possible. (I have already indicated the standards by which such progress is to be measured. It involves an increase in the justice of society's institutions and arrangements. That, in turn, means that the conditions needed for living a good human life—for the pursuit of happiness—have been extended to a larger proportion of society's members.)

In one widely accepted sense of the word "revolutionary," a change that is radical and progressive is, *ipso facto*, also a rev-

olutionary change—one that turns a corner in human affairs. A change that is revolutionary, in this sense of the word, may or may not be brought about by the kind of armed insurrection or violent action that is called a revolt or rebellion. The three great changes that I have in mind were accompanied by revolutionary action, either at their outset, or in their defense against reactionary movements, or in their spread and development. When, in what follows, I refer to them as three great revolutions, I will be stressing both points—that the changes were revolutionary turning points and that they were initiated, defended, or consolidated by revolutionary action.

For brevity of reference and also for the symbolic value that is involved in the designation, I am going to name each of the three revolutions by identifying it with the time and place of its first institutional fulfillment—*first,* please note, *not final or fullest* institutional accomplishment. Each of these revolutions is still going on and, in my judgment, will continue to go on until the ideal at which it aims is completely realized in securely established institutions and realized for all mankind. In other words, each of these revolutions has a history, longer or shorter according to the length of time that has elapsed since its first inception. And that history is, for the most part, a checkered career, in which the advance that was made at one time or place is lost at another, regained and lost again, over and over, until the institutions involved in the change have become sufficiently well established to resist corruption or reaction.

Permit me to add two further preliminary observations. Each of these revolutions was a social experiment, in the sense in which we speak of experimenting as trying something new. For those who engaged in the experiment, it was an experience, a new experience that men had not had before. Each also involved an idea, an idea that may have been expressed and formulated in advance of the revolutionary action or the institutional change, but the general acknowledgment of which almost always followed it and reflected its accomplishment. Hence, in connection with each of these revolutions, I shall be able to name the writings in which the revolutionary idea was set forth, either by way of anticipation or by way of summation. [1]

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The three great institutional changes that have been accompanied by signal advances in political thought are, *first,* the Greek revolution, which began in the seventh century B.C. and has been going on ever since; *second,* the American revolution, which began in the first part of the nineteenth century, is still going on and still spreading; and, *third,* the Russian revolution, which began in the twentieth century and which, taken together with its two predecessors, is now effecting changes that are almost global in their extent.

The Greek revolution marks the advent of constitutional government and of citizenship—the two most fundamental political inventions and innovations ever achieved. Until the Greek cities set up and adopted constitutions under which some men, never all, enjoyed the status of citizens exercising a voice in their own government, all men living in cities were subject to the arbitrary and absolute rule of despots. This was clearly a radical and progressive change in social arrangements.

The passage from a state of affairs in which no men had political liberty to a state of affairs in which some men, *even if only a few,* became free men politically through being citizens and having a share in the sovereignty, was a change in kind; something that did not exist before came into being for the first time. The change thus accomplished was progressive; it was a step toward recognizing a basic natural right that had never been acknowledged before.

What was in its inception a Greek experiment and, for the relatively short duration of a little less than four hundred years, a Greek experience, became in subsequent centuries an experiment performed in other places and an experience enjoyed by other peoples. Two hundred years after its initiation in Greece, constitutional government was instituted in Rome, with the expulsion of the Tarquins, and endured with varying vicissitudes until the retrogression of Rome to despotism under the Caesars. It made its next appearance in the constitutional provisions of the mixed regimes that developed during the feudal Middle Ages

in Western Europe. The revolt of the barons that led to the signing of Magna Carta in 1215 marked the introduction of the mixed regime in England. Another manifestation of mediaeval constitutionalism is to be found in the wording of the pledge entered into by the Spanish nobles at the coronation of the kings of Aragon: "We who are as good as you, swear to you who are no better than we, to accept you as our king, provided you observe all our liberties and laws; but if not, not." [2]

When, with the recurrence and rise of absolute monarchies, the mixed regime dissolved in favor of its despotic component, the Greek revolution had to be fought and won again and again in modern Europe: in England in 1688 at the time of the so-called "bloodless revolution"; in the rebellion of the American colonies against the despotism of Parliament; in the overthrow of the Bourbons in France and the setting up of the first French republic; in the revolutionary uprisings that occurred in Europe and in Central and South America in the middle of the nineteenth century and that struggled for some vestige of representative government; and right down to the present century in Russia in 1905 and 1917 and in the spread of efforts to set up republics in the Far East and in Africa. Thus, from the seventeenth century on, the republican ideal that was first realized in the Greek experiment and experience has acted as a powerful leaven to bring about the radical and progressive advent of constitutionalism in all parts of the modern world.

Though it can be said with a certain degree of assurance that constitutionalism has been well developed and securely established in the United States, in Great Britain and its associated self-ruling commonwealths, in most of Western Europe, in Japan, and even, perhaps, in India and Pakistan, one cannot speak in the same vein of the Soviet Socialist Republics, of the Arab republics, of the recently established new national regimes in Africa, or of most of the Latin American governments. In all essentials, these are republics in name or in aspiration rather than in fact and in operation. Hence not only in these areas and for these populations, but also in other regions and for other peoples, the Greek experiment is still either to be initiated or carried out more fully, so that societies everywhere on earth will have, in some measure,

the experience of constitutional government—rule of law, citizenship, and suffrage.

The idea of constitutional government, together with the republican ideal that it generates, did not make its appearance as an expressly formulated doctrine in political philosophy until the Greek experiment had been tried and the Greek experience had matured. Not until the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. did Plato's *Statesman* and Aristotle's *Politics* distill the Greek experience into the formulations of political thought. Cicero's *Republic* performed the same service for the Roman experience, as did the writings of Bracton and Fortescue for the mediaeval experience of the mixed regime—the rule that was both royal and constitutional. In the modern world, Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws*, Locke's *Second Essay on Civil Government*, and Rousseau's *Social Contract* argued the case for constitutionalism and the republican ideal in advance of the revolutions in England and in France that began to take the steps forward that these documents recommend. Schooled in these writings as well as in those of antiquity, the writers of the *Federalist Papers* concerned themselves mainly with the specific provisions of the American consitution, for they no longer regarded the replacement of despotism by constitutional government as needing elaborate defense.

In the realm of political action, the Greek revolution has not yet been fully won nor the Greek experiment and experience fully universalized, but the fundamental normative truths involved in the Greek idea have, in the domain of political thought, now become almost universally acknowledged. No major or respected political philosopher in the twentieth century has argued or would argue for the abolition of citizenship and the overthrow of constitutional government in order to re-establish an absolute or despotic regime.

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The American revolution, *not* the rebellion of the colonies in 1776, *but* the gradual emergence of a democratic republic,

is the second radical turning point and step of progress in political institutions and political thought.

In this case, the idea of political equality—the equal enjoyment of political freedom by all men as citizens with suffrage—and the democratic ideal that it projects were envisioned or proclaimed in advance of the institutional changes that constitute the revolutionary experiment and experience. One of the first intimations of the doctrine occurs as early as the first half of the seventeenth century, in the arguments for suffrage reforms advanced by the Levellers in a debate which took place in Cromwell's army in 1647. [3] Early proclamations of the democratic ideal are to be found in pre-revolutionary American writings, in the Declaration of Independence, in the suffrage debate in New York State in 1820, [4] and in the Gettysburg Address. These statements cannot be read as descriptive of existing institutions; they are rather pledges to the future; they call for revolutionary changes still to be made.

Throughout the nineteenth century and right down to the present, the gradual achievement of an equality of political conditions through the broadening of the franchise in the direction of universal suffrage did not occur only in the United States. It was concurrently happening in Great Britain and its associated commonwealths, in many of the states of Western Europe, and elsewhere. Nevertheless, there is good reason for speaking of the democratic revolution as American in origin. It lies in Tocqueville's insight about America as the first republic to be born in a land without a feudal past, without a feudal tradition of ranks and privileges, and so without the persistence of feudal class distinctions. [5] American society was, therefore, peculiarly hospitable to the idea of political equality and inclined to take the steps necessary for a progressive realization of the democratic ideal. [6]

Though the ideal is not yet fully realized in practice anywhere, the democratic experiment has been carried further and the democratic experience has been more widely enjoyed in the United States and in a small number of other countries that, either concurrently or subsequently, have moved in the same

direction. In large areas of the world, the democratic ideal, even where it is nominally acknowledged, still remains no more than a pledge to the future; and there are many places where it is not operative even as an acknowledged ideal.

In the sphere of political thought, the first great book in political philosophy to argue for constitutional democracy as the ideal polity was as recent as John Stuart Mill's *Representative Government*, published in 1861. With the exception of Plato's *Republic*, twenty-four centuries earlier, it is also the first great book in political philosophy to argue explicitly for the political equality of men and women. Of the two, Plato's is the more radical statement of the case for the equality of the sexes. Between Plato and Mill, there is little or no discussion of the issue; the disfranchisement of women is either tacitly assumed or explicitly asserted without argument. And it was not until the twentieth century that the democratic revolution really matured with the success of the woman's suffrage movement in such countries as the United States and England. Until that point was reached, political democracy—with half the adult human population disfranchised—did not really begin to exist. [7]

What I said earlier about the almost universal acceptance of constitutional goverement, as preferable to despotism, does not apply to political democracy. The issues about political democracy are still moot questions in political theory. While political equality through universal suffrage has able defenders, it also has able opponents, as we shall see in Chapter 11. And this is likely to continue until the democratic experience has become more widely diffused and until the democratic experiment has succeeded in surmounting the difficulties that are inherent in so radical a change.

That the change involved in the American revolution is both radical and progressive should be clear. The transition from republics in which only some men are enfranchised citizens and in which there still remains a sharp distinction between a ruling and a subject class, to republics in which all men have suffrage and all belong to the ruling class, consists in passing from a politically class-divided society to a politically classless society.

That is a change in kind, not in degree; and it is clearly progressive. It carries forward the advance first made when the right to political liberty was acknowledged in the early republics, but acknowledged with qualifications and restrictions that granted citizenship to the few or to the many, but always to less than all.

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The Russian revolution is difficult to describe in a fashion that parallels the account just given of the Greek and the American revolutions for two reasons.

In the first place, the Greek and the American revolutions can be described as cumulatively progressive. As I just pointed out, the democratic experiment carries forward to fuller realization an ideal that is only partially realized in the republican experiment. While there can be constitutional government without political democracy, political democracy is impossible without constitutional government. Such phases as "constitutional democracy" and "democratic republic" indicate not only that the republican and democratic ideals are compatible, but also that democracy is a form of constitutional government. When it is understood that democracy is superior to oligarchy as the other basic form of constitutional government, by virtue of the greater justice that results from the extension of the franchise from some to all, it is seen that the transition from oligarchical to democratic republics is progressive.

Can the Russian revolution be similarly described as cumulatively progressive, conserving the radical gains made by the Greek and the American revolutions, and yet adding thereto a further step of progress toward the fullest realization of the best society that is possible? I think it can be if we are willing to distinguish between the socialist ideal (i.e., the end aimed at by the socialist revolution or experiment) and the socialist program (i.e., the means proposed or employed for achieving the end in view).

The end of socialism is the establishment of social and economic

equality, brought about by the abolition of privileged classes and by the participation of all in the general social and economic welfare. As thus defined, the socialist ideal is definitely cumulative with regard to the ideals aimed at by the two preceding revolutions. Social and economic equality are not merely compatible with the political equality of universal suffrage, but, upon closer examination, they will be seen to be indispensable to the fullest realization of political democracy. The socialist democratic republic is an advance over the republic that is democratic only in the narrowly political sense, by going still further in the direction of achieving the truly classless society—the society in which an equality of all conditions obtains, not just an equality of political status and opportunity, but also an equality of economic and of social conditions. [8]

One might replace the word "socialism" by speaking of economic and social democracy, as additions to or extensions of what, in the narrow sense of the term, we call political democracy; but to do so might involve a loss of some of the historic connotations of the word, which remind us of the fundamental changes in the economic system and in social institutions that are required for the achievement of the socialist ideal.

While there is no question that the socialist ideal is compatible with the republican and democratic ideals of the two earlier revolutions and additive thereto, the same cannot be said for certain features of the socialist program. Let me mention only two.

First, in the program of Marxist communism, the abolition of the private ownership of all means of production and their transfer to the state, together with the dictatorship of the proletariat in the first stage of the communist revolution, would appear to be destructive of constitutional democracy. In the program of anarchistic communism or of syndicalism, as outlined, for example, by Bakunin or Kropotkin, or by Sorel, the abolition of the private ownership of all means of production is to be accompanied by the abolition of the state itself, at least in any of its known historic forms; and this would also appear to be destructive of constitutional democracy. I say "appears" in order not to fore-

close or beg the question, but to postpone for later consideration a question that we shall have to deal with at some length; namely, what measures or means for realizing the socialist ideal would not only sustain but also consolidate the gains made by the earlier revolutions, rather than wipe them out. [9]

My second difficulty with regard to the Russian revolution concerns the propriety of letting the great institutional changes that began to take place in Russia in 1917 stand for or symbolize the whole socialist movement in all its many forms. As the *Communist Manifesto* itself makes clear, socialism either as a revolutionary ideal or as a revolutionary program, did not begin with that document in 1848. It is not necessary to enumerate the writings of the many economic and social reformers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century—in England, in France, in Germany, in the United States, as well as in Russia—in order to point out that the socialist ideal and one or another socialist program were under discussion and debate for almost a full century before the Russian revolution occurred. [10]

Why, then, should we regard the Russian revolution as symbolizing the third great institutional change which has occasioned or conditioned an advance in political thought? My answer is that, with the Russian revolution, we have, for the first time, the emergence of the welfare state—a society concerned with the economic and social welfare of its whole population. It was only after the Russian experiment had begun that other technologically advanced nations in the West or in the East undertook experiments in the socialization of the economy that created other versions of the welfare state. It therefore seems justifiable to say that, although the socialist ideal had been in the air for a hundred years or more, the Russian revolution resulted in the adoption of the socialist ideal by many societies that gradually transformed themselves into welfare states without fully adopting the socialist program of either Marxist or anarchistic communism.

In a sense, the Russian revolution has been more successful than the American revolution in gaining acceptance for its ideal. In the world as it is today, both East and West, South and North, the socialist ideal of the welfare state, separated from the spe-

cifically communist programs for realizing that ideal, has won a more impressive victory. Not only can it claim, in the world of action, the allegiance of more peoples than the ideal of constitutional democracy. In addition, in the domain of thought or theory, it has fewer able and respected opponents than democracy—fewer who question the practicability of the ideal, fewer who doubt that the ideal can be fully realized by one or another set of practicable measures.

It remains to be said, of course, that the tripartite ideal which sums up the cumulative advances made by the three great revolutions—the tripartite ideal of the socialist democratic republic—is still far from realization anywhere in the world today. Recognizing this to be the case is quite consistent with recognizing that the three revolutions—the three experiments in institutional reform and the three alterations in social experience—have produced significant advances in political thought that would not have been possible without them. The point is not that without them the new truths or insights might not have been discovered. In the case of the American and the Russian experiments, the seminal insights were present and the truths dimly seen even before the revolutionary action began and developed. But the acknowledgment of these insights and truths as matters of common-sense wisdom, together with a sound philosophical elaboration of them, sprang from the common experience of men living in societies the institutions of which had been radically altered by these revolutions.

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The description of each of these revolutions as an advance—as a step of progress—in political life as well as in political thought involved an expressed or implied normative judgment: that one state of affairs or one set of opinions is better than another. Let me make quite explicit the three normative judgments which have thus emerged.

The first was that the transition from despotic to constitutional

government is an improvement by virtue of the fact that with the creation of citizenship at least some men—the few who were citizens in the republics of antiquity—enjoyed political liberty and exercised the right to participate in the government of their community.

The second normative judgment was that a further advance along the same line is made when citizenship or suffrage is universalized and the right to participate in government is recognized as one that all men have by virtue of their equality as men. As the constitutionalism of a republic is an improvement over the despotism of absolute rule, so the democratization of the republic is an improvement over the oligarchical constitution that restricted suffrage to a privileged political class, whether on the grounds of wealth, birth, race, sex, or nationality.

In describing the second great advance as the democratic revolution, I am using the term "democracy" in the narrowly political sense in which it encompasses no more than the achievement of political equality—the accession of all men to the equal political status of citizenship with suffrage. Thus used, democracy does not mean equality in all respects, but equality only with respect to participation in government and in the possession of political rights. The term democracy has been and can properly be used in the broader sense of referring to all the conditions of communal life—social and economic as well as political. The recognition of this broader sense involves what I have denominated the socialist revolution—the revolution that calls for social and economic democracy to supplement political democracy and render it efficacious.

This brings us to the third normative judgment, the one involved in regarding the socialist revolution as a still further advance along the same line, which begins with the acknowledgment that political liberty and equality are right and good for at least some men and moves forward to the judgment that they are not only right and good for all men, but also that their full achievement for all men requires that they be extended from participation in government to the social and economic aspects of communal life as well.

To say that liberty and equality with respect to the political, economic, and social conditions of communal life are right for all men is to say that men have a natural right to them, a right that is common to all men because of their sameness as human beings. And to say this is to say that these things are really good for men—that all men ought to have them—because they are needed by every man in his pursuit of happiness, his effort to live well. They are not ultimate goods, but indispensable means to the ultimate good that every man is morally obliged to seek—the happiness which consists in a whole life lived well.

While the meaning of justice is not exhausted by reference to natural rights, one measure of the justice of a community is the extent to which it secures the natural rights of man and secures them not merely for some members of society but for all. Hence the three normative judgments can be expressed in terms of justice as well as in terms of liberty and equality. The transition from despotic regimes to the constitutional government of republics is an advance in justice; the democratization of republics marks a further increase in justice; and the socialization of democracies enlarges justice still further.

The readers of this book—or at least a substantial number of them—may not question the normative judgments that I have just expressed or the values in terms of which they are formulated. Concurring in these judgments, they may ask who would deny that liberty and equality—social and economic as well as political—are goods that all men have a right to demand. Who would hesitate to admit that one society is better than another in proportion as its institutions and arrangements are more just? And, therefore, who could challenge or dispute the judgment that republics are better than despotisms, that democracies are better than oligarchies, and that socialized democracies are better than those in which economic and social inequalities still persist?

Those who think this way may, therefore, question the necessity of defending these basic normative judgments by further argument; and they may even wonder what tasks are left to political philosophy once these judgments are accepted as normative truths. Let me address myself to the state of mind that I have just delineated.

It is necessary, first, to remember that we are living at the end of the twentieth century and that the truth of these judgments was not acknowledged in earlier centuries, or even at the beginning of this century, either by men generally or by political philosophers. Second, it must be recognized that even though these truths are generally acknowledged today in certain quarters of the world, they are not yet universally acknowledged—in the West or in the East, or in the Southern Hemisphere. Third, even where they have come to be matters of common sense, they are not as well understood as they might be, their implications are not fully seen nor their relation to other basic propositions in the framework of principles that constitute an adequate political philosophy.

Hence even for those who accept, as matters of common sense, the normative judgments concerning constitutional government, democracy, and socialism, the philosopher has a service to perfrom, which involves clarifying their meaning, deepening our understanding of their truth, relating them to other truths, and solving the problems that we become aware of when we accept them as true.

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The foregoing review of the revolutionary changes in the institutions of society that have occasioned or conditioned advances in political thought leaves most of the basic questions of political philosophy unanswered.

The few answers that may appear to have been given—by normative judgments concerning constitutional government, democracy, and socialism—have been advanced without the analysis and reasoning required for establishing their truth. The fact that a man of common sense may today recognize the truth of these normative judgments is no more than the point of departure for the political philosopher whose task it is to offer reasons in support of such judgments and others.

I shall try to discharge that task, in the chapters that follow, by setting forth, as briefly as possible, the controlling principles

that constitute the common sense of politics and that express the political wisdom that is now available to us in the twentieth century. I will begin, in the next two chapters, by attempting to answer the two most fundamental questions—the question about the origin and nature of the state, why it is necessary, and if necessary whether it is a necessary evil or intrinsically good; and a similar question about government, its necessity, and goodness. I will then go on, in subsequent chapters, to questions about freedom, equality, and justice, ending with an attempt to project, in the light of our limited experience so far, the best society that is now seen to be possible.